

Statement from the Director-General
USAID meeting of stakeholders on the neglected tropical diseases

This is a message from Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director-General of WHO.

Colleagues in public health, ladies and gentleman,

First and foremost, let me say how important this stakeholders meeting is for WHO, its partners, endemic countries, and the 1.2 billion people who are debilitated or permanently disfigured by these diseases.

I am sorry I cannot be with you in person, and have asked Dr. Nakatani to deliver these remarks on my behalf.

The US Presidential Initiative is huge boost to control that will be met with open arms.

I am privileged to know the senior representatives from the countries at this meeting. I am pleased to say: this initiative benefits from a high level of commitment in endemic countries.

The financial investment behind this initiative is already substantial, but several factors amplify its impact. The interventions are highly cost-effective.

The benefits to affected populations are immediate, multiple, and highly visible. These benefits, in turn, stimulate demand for treatment. Let me stress: these are disfiguring diseases deeply dreaded by populations.

This event is a breakthrough. It can change the long and notorious history of diseases that have caused misery and sapped productivity since antiquity.

With good technical tools, good strategies, national commitment, and the generosity of governments, we can finally get the upper hand on diseases that have been considered, for so long, as the inevitable companions of poverty and misery.

I warmly welcome your efforts to strive for a value-added impact through careful planning and targeting of investments. Synergies with other US-

supported initiatives, such as those for malaria immunization, and improvements in water supply and sanitation, can improve the lives of affected populations in broad ways, strengthening the very foundations for social progress and prosperity.

Since taking office, I have been deeply committed to the control of the neglected tropical diseases. In the midst of so many perfect storms brewing on so many fronts, I regard control of these diseases as a perfect rainbow of hope. We now see a whole spectrum of opportunities that have converged in a most harmonious way.

Safe and powerful drugs are being donated through public-private partnerships or made available at very low cost. Integrated approaches have been devised for tackling several diseases at once, with limited demands of health systems and staff. Delivery mechanisms piggy-back on existing systems.

A strategy of mass preventive chemotherapy, aimed at reaching all at risk, rivals the protective power of immunization. Research continues to document the gains in poverty reduction and economic productivity achieved when these diseases are controlled. A perfect rainbow really can end in a pot of gold.

Above all, control of these diseases represents an opportunity to attack a root cause of poverty affecting a huge number of people. With a comparatively modest, time-limited financial push, many of these diseases can be controlled by 2015. Some can even be eliminated by that date. This is the ultimate form of sustainable development.

For example, at a cost of well under one dollar per person, we could blanket the entire at-risk population in Africa with drugs offering protection against the seven most prevalent neglected tropical diseases on the continent. That would be contribution to poverty alleviation on a truly grand scale.

Please know that, while I cannot be with you in person, I am with you fully in a spirit of collaboration and deep appreciation for this Initiative.